



# DCR's Volunteers in Parks Program

Presentation  
to the DCR  
Stewardship Council

September 6, 2013



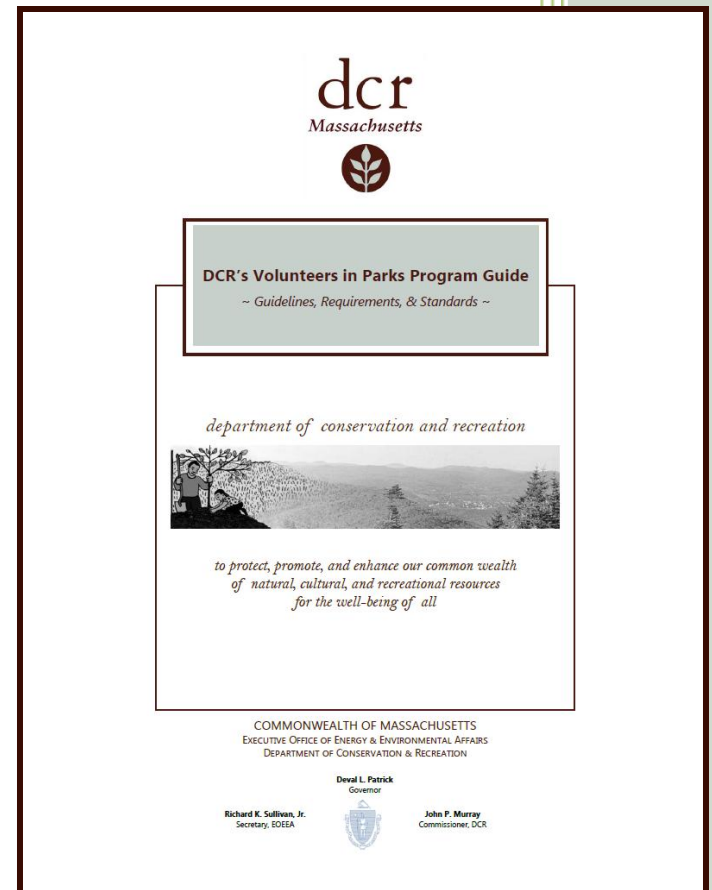
# Presentation Objectives

- Provide an update on development of the Volunteers in Parks Program Guide
- Provide an overview of the Draft Guide and key elements of the Program
- Outline plans for DCR's upcoming public process



# Milestones Achieved

- Received further input from Union leadership and reached agreement on our draft guidelines
- Completed a draft version of the *Volunteers in Parks Program Guide* (including draft versions of relevant forms and logs)
- Issued a preview copy of the draft Guide publicly on June 21<sup>st</sup> and announced upcoming public process



# Key Goals of the Program & Guide

- Enhance communication and coordination between volunteers, nonprofit organizations and DCR staff
- Establish a consistent process for proposing and reviewing volunteer projects
- Better document volunteer contributions
- Achieve the objectives of MGL c. 21, 17G (*An Act Relative to Volunteers in State Parks, 2007*) regarding liability provisions for volunteers involved in approved events/projects



# Defining “Volunteer Activities”

## Stewardship Activities

- Trail Clearing/Maintenance
- Planting trees
- Invasives removal
- Litter pickup



## Fundraising/ Special Event Activities

- Proposed/Coordinated by Nonprofit Organization (like a Park Friends Group)
- Co-Sponsored by DCR
- Event must further a public purpose relevant to DCR
- Any funds raised must support or improve a DCR program or property





# Overview of Program & Guide

## Stewardship Activities



Common Volunteer  
Stewardship Activities

**VS.**



More Complex  
Volunteer Projects

# Overview of Program & Guide

## Stewardship Activities

- Common Volunteer Stewardship Activities
  - General clean-ups of an area, including litter and refuse removal.
  - Assisting DCR staff with educational programs or events.
  - Removing invasive plant species.
  - Researching historical or scientific information regarding park resources or property.
  - Maintaining a park's recycling center; sorting recyclable materials from non-recyclable materials.

# Overview of Program & Guide

## Stewardship Activities

- Common Volunteer Stewardship Activities
  - Planting flowers, trees or shrubs to enhance landscaping, create habitat or otherwise enhance a DCR property or facility.
  - Performing minor trimming or weeding with hand tools.
  - Performing trail maintenance activities with hand tools such as removing fallen limbs, trimming brush, and maintaining drainage structures, creating steps, re-blazing existing trails, and maintaining existing bog bridges.
  - Organizing activities or events intended to promote public awareness and appreciation for park resources.



# Overview of Program & Guide

## Stewardship Activities

- More Complex Stewardship Projects
  - In general, includes activities beyond the scope of the “Common Volunteer Stewardship Activities”
    - New trail construction
    - Significant re-route of existing trail
    - Construction of bridges along trails
  - Projects involving use of power equipment, such as chainsaws



# Overview of Program & Guide

## Stewardship Activities *Proposal & Review Process*

- **Step 1:** Communicate / Consult with DCR Field Staff
- **Step 2:** Complete Volunteer/Stewardship Agreement Form
- **Step 3:** Submit VSA Form to Facility Supervisor / Manager
  - At least 14 days prior to proposed activity date
  - 14-day requirement may be waived for Common Volunteer Activities
- **Step 4:** DCR Reviews VSA Form
- **Step 5:** DCR Issues Response within 14 days of receipt





# Overview of Program & Guide

## Fundraising / Special Event Activities *Proposal & Review Process*

- **Step 1:** Communicate / Consult with DCR Field Staff
- **Step 2:** Complete Volunteer/Stewardship Agreement Form
- **Step 3:** Submit VSA Form to Facility Supervisor / Manager
  - At least 45 days prior to proposed activity date
- **Step 4:** DCR Reviews VSA Form & Determines Whether to Co-Sponsor
- **Step 5:** DCR Issues Response
- **Step 6:** Submit Financial Report to DCR within 30 days

# Liability Provisions for Volunteers

## Agency-Approved Stewardship Activities

- Volunteers are normally protected under the state's Tort Claims Act (MGL c. 258) as "uncompensated public employees"

## Proposed Requirements for Coverage

- Agency approval of proposed project/activities via a Volunteer/Stewardship Agreement (VSA) Form
- Volunteer must sign Volunteer Release Form prior to starting duties
  - *Only one form needed for multiple/ongoing activities*
- Volunteer must appear in Volunteer Service Log

# Liability Provisions for Volunteers

## Events/Activities Led by Nonprofit Orgs.

- Includes Fundraising/Special Event Activities
- Volunteers did not previously enjoy liability protections as “uncompensated public employees” under MGL c. 258
- MGL c. 21, 17G designed to allow DCR to co-sponsor Nonprofit Organization projects and events and allows volunteers to be covered as “uncompensated public employees”



# Liability Provisions for Volunteers

## Events/Activities Led by Nonprofit Orgs.

- Statutorily-Mandated Requirements for Coverage
  - DCR approval and co-sponsorship of event or activity
  - Event or activity furthers a public purpose of the DCR
  - Funds raised are used and expended by the nonprofit or DCR to support or improve a DCR program or facility
- Additional Proposed Requirements for Coverage
  - Volunteer must sign Volunteer Release Form before starting duties
  - Volunteer must appear in Volunteer Service Log



# Changes & Improvements

- Welcoming tone and clear/concise language
- Logical and coherent structure and layout
- Explicit clarification around liability issues and agency expectations for obtaining liability protection
- A clear and consistent process for proposing and reviewing volunteer activities – whether under supervision of DCR or Nonprofit Organization



## Changes & Improvements

- Streamlined review process for many of the most common stewardship activities
- Single VSA Form for proposing volunteer activities
- Streamlined process for organizing and proposing numerous volunteer activities during the year
  - A single VSA Form can be used for proposing multiple/ongoing volunteer activities
- A single Volunteer Release Form for multiple/ongoing activities contained in a VSA Form



# Changes & Improvements

- Establishes clear provisions for requesting DCR co-sponsorship of events to meet MGL c. 21, 17G
- Volunteer reporting process provides mechanism to document and track volunteer contributions



## Final Thoughts

DCR recognizes that volunteer activities can take many forms and involve both small-scale and more complex efforts

- The Volunteer in Parks Program and the Guide are intended to provide **flexibility** to meet what we understand will be a variety of potential needs, conditions, and circumstances
- The Guide is designed to provide an overall **structure** and **foundation** for DCR's Volunteer in Parks Program



## Final Thoughts

DCR hopes the Guide will serve as a living document

- We intend to **learn as we go along** and expect our volunteers, partners, and staff to be a part of this process
- Ongoing assessment and input will allow us to improve the Program and its implementation over time and **enhance our support and encouragement of volunteer stewardship**





# Next Steps

## September 2013

- Gathering input from our staff

## October 2013

- Begin public review process
- Host three public meetings around the state to present the proposed Program and draft Guide
- Following the public meetings, initiate a 30-day written comment period

## December 2013

- DCR will review public comment and make revisions

## January 2014

- DCR issues Final *Volunteers in Parks Program Guide*





# DCR's Volunteers in Parks Program

Questions?

